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# FACT SHEET

FOR PART-TIME  
FARMERS AND  
GARDENERS



UNITED STATES  
DEPARTMENT  
OF AGRICULTURE

## BROODING AND REARING CHICKS FOR THE FAMILY FLOCK

### Start With Quality Chicks

1. Buy chicks from a reliable hatchery. There are some advantages in buying from a local source if they can provide quality chicks, information and service to their customers.

2. Buy the strain or type of chicks to fit your needs. If you are interested only in egg production, order sexed pullets of Leghorn or egg-type strains. If you are interested in meat, order one of the popular broiler crosses or White Plymouth Rocks. There are dual-purpose strains for those interested in both eggs and meat.

### Brooder Floor Space

Normal brooding period when heat is required is around 6-8 weeks. There are many places on the farm where chicks may be brooded. The main requirements are: (1) adequate space (2) reliable source of heat (brooder) and (3) proper ventilation.

The following space is recommended:

Age of chicks	Floor space/bird
0-4 weeks	1/2 sq. ft.
4-8 weeks	1 sq. ft.
8-12 weeks	2 sq. ft.
12 weeks or longer	2 1/2-3 sq. ft. (light breeds) 3-3 1/2 sq. ft. (heavy breeds).

*Example:* A 10' x 12' brooder house will take care of 120 chicks to 8 weeks of age.

### Brooders

The most popular brooders are infrared heat lamps, propane catalytic and gas brooders. Your choice among these should depend on convenience, installation cost and operating costs.

The infrared heat lamp (pyrex-type) is ideal for brooding small lots of 200 chicks or less. Make certain the lamp is equipped with a porcelain socket, lamp guard and at least No. 16 heavy insulation wire. Provide one 250-watt lamp for each 50 to 75 chicks.

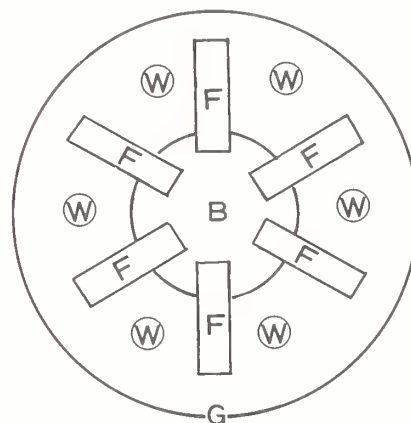


Figure 1: Brooder arrangement.

B - brooder stove with hover.

F - Feeders arranged in spoke-like fashion.

W - Waterers (quart size).

G - Chick guard 18 inches high arranged in 4-6 foot diameter circle around brooder.

Gas brooders are very reliable and may be used if gas is used elsewhere on the farm and purchased in sizable volume. The main advantage of the catalytic brooder is that it is flameless and almost 100 percent efficient.

### Feeder Space

The amount of feeder space recommended per 100 chicks is:

Age of chicks	Feeder space
0-4 weeks	12 linear ft. or two 3-ft feeders
4-8 weeks	20 linear ft. or two 5-ft. feeders
8-12 weeks	30 linear ft. or three 5-ft feeders
12 weeks and older	40 linear ft. or four 5-ft. feeders

### Waterer Space

The amount of waterer space recommended per 100 chicks is:

Age of chicks	Waterer space
0-1 weeks	Six 1-qt jar waterers.
1-4 weeks	Two 2-gal. waterers
4-12 weeks	Two 5-gal. waterers

Automatic waterers may be used after the first week.

## Before Chicks Arrive

1. Remove old litter. Clean and disinfect ceiling, walls and floor of the poultry house. Let the house dry thoroughly before putting down new litter. Clean disinfect all equipment including feeders, waterers and brooders.

2. Repair windows, doors, ventilators or any part of the brooder house needing attention. Eliminate drafts.

3. Cover the floor with 3 to 4 inches of dry litter. Use shavings, sawdust or other material that is readily available, economical and has good moisture absorbency.

4. Use a chick guard (circular fence about 18 inches high) to confine birds near the brooder. (See Figure 1) Some people cover the litter for the first few days of brooding. If you do this, use rough, crinkled paper. Smooth paper causes chicks to slip and develop spraddled legs. Molds will develop if paper is left on the litter more than three to four days. Remove guard after seven days.

5. Check all equipment to see that it is working properly. Operate brooder stoves for at least 24 hours before the chicks arrive. This will warm and dry the house and demonstrate to you that the accuracy of brooder controls and thermostats.

6. Put out feed and fill waterers a few hours before the chicks arrive. When chicks arrive be ready for them.

## Management of Chicks

### After Chicks Arrive

1. Adjust brooder stove to 90-95°F, measured 2 inches above the litter at edge of hover. Maintain this temperature for the first week. Reduce temperature five degrees each week until 70°F is reached.

2. Watch chicks closely for the first few days and nights to see that they are comfortable. They will crowd under the hover if they are too cold and away from the hover if they are too warm.

3. If infrared lamps are used, raise the lamps when chicks appear to be too warm. Normally, lamps should be set 18 inches high the first week and raised 3 inches each week.

4. Provide plenty of fresh air for chicks. Do not close house up tight to keep it warm. Chicks need fresh air and air is used to carry moisture out of the house. The floor will be dryer and the chicks healthier when proper ventilation is provided.

5. Keep litter dry. This is important in preventing coccidiosis and other diseases. Frequent stirring of litter helps keep it dry. Adding some hydrated lime to the litter will also help.

### Light

A 15-watt bulb for each 200 square feet of floor area should be kept on the chicks at night for the first week. Thereafter, the lighting system used depends on the type of building. Any system that provides a maximum of 14 hours total light per day during the entire brooding and growing period should give satisfactory results.

### Roost

Roosts are not used for broilers. They can be used for layer replacement chicks if desired. Install low roosts at four to six weeks of age providing each chick with 4 inches of roost space.

## Feed And Water Management

Keep feed and water before chicks at all times. Clean waterers frequently and place them on slatted or wire platforms so birds will be kept away from wet floor areas. Prevent feed wastage by filling feeders only one-third to one-half full.

### Feeding

For the first six weeks feed a 20-22 percent protein starter mash; then change to an all mash 16 percent grower or 20 percent protein grower plus an equal amount of grain. The starter mash may contain an antibiotic at high level for the first ten days to help chicks get a good start.

A coccidiostat (a drug used to control the disease, coccidiosis) should be used in the ration continuously throughout the growing period. You will need about 900 pounds of feed per 100 birds for the first eight weeks.

### Cannibalism

Anytime birds are confined they are subject to cannibalism. If possible, buy chicks that have been debeaked at the hatchery. Watch for early signs of feather picking and debeak the birds before it becomes an established habit. Clip off tip of the beak with a dog's toe nail clippers or electric debeaking machine.

### Protecting The Flock

Young chicks and growing birds should be protected and isolated from other animals and birds. Cats, rodents and numerous wild animals will kill young chickens. These animals can also spread diseases and parasites. They can contaminate and consume large amounts of poultry feed in addition to being destructive to the building.